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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the recent population growth in nonmetropolitan areas and race is analyzed in this paper. Despite several years of research on numerous aspects of the population turnaround, little is known about the role of aversion to particular racial groups in the shift, the degree to which many of the quality-of-life decisions given for moving contain racial overtones, or the involvement of blacks in the new migration. Examination of the racial composition of population growth in 75 Midwestern counties that have experienced substantial urban-to-rural migration shows that the immigrant stream is predominantly white. Analysis of the reasons for moving given by a sample of these urban-to-rural migrants clearly points to the importance of non-economic motivations that can be interpreted as having racial overtones. Such issues as "busing," "urban crime," and "undesirable conditions in the city" may well be code words masking direct expressions of racial views. The paper ends by suggesting some means of exploring the hypothesis that racially-motivated aversion is implicated in the new migration to rural areas. (CMG)

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A RESEARCH NOTE ON NONMETROPOLITAN POPULATION INCREASE, THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF RURAL LIVING, AND RACE[1]

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines, first, the racial composition of population growth in 75 Midwestern counties which have experienced substantial inmigration, and concludes that the inmigrant stream is predominantly white. Second, the paper examines the reasons for migration given by a sample of urban-to-rural migrants to those counties. In absence of frequent reference to race as an issue by migrants who give anti-urban reasons for moving, the paper ends by suggesting some means of exploring the hypothesis that racial aversion is implicated in the new migration to rural ares.

A Research Note on Nonmetropolitan Population Increase,
the Attractiveness of Rural Living, and Race.

INTRODUCTION

The considerable body of research on the recent resurgence of population growth in many nonmetropolitan areas has established the fact that many of the inmigrants, largely coming from the cities, moved for "environmental" or "quality of life" reasons. In contrast to the earlier movement of people to the cities in which economic opportunities and the attractions of an urban lifestyle were dominant, the turnaround in migration is apparently influenced by the perceived attractiveness of rural living and a corresponding disenchantment with life in the city (see e.g., Blackwood and Carpenter, 1978).

Since Beal (1975) first pointed out the emergence of what came to be referred to as the "new migration" or "population turnaround" there have been extensive analyses of the reasons underlying this phenomenon and the composition of the urban-to-rural stream. These results have been widely published. More recently, attention has focused on a variety of impact and consequence issues, and on speculations about continuation of the trend into the future. Throughout this evolution of the research agenda, one topic seems to have been widely taken for granted but seldom treated explicitly. That topic is the role of race in the new migration. Questions are sometimes raised about whether the shift has racial overtones, but researchers have been relatively silent, while the media have made speculative comments.

The more popular media, in reporting on the reasons underlying the trend, have not avoided the suggestion that race was an issue, although admittedly not the major driving force behind the shift. A comment from

a Time cover story illustrates the media view: "Behind the migrants vision sometimes lurks a disturbing aversion, an unspoken desire to get away from the increasingly black urban centers" (Time, 1976:56). Other media have referred to "racial tension in schools" (Wittner, 1975:31), a desire to move to a "more wholesome environment for many young families" (Merrill, 1982:7), to get away from neighborhoods that are "getting tough" (U.S. News and World Report, 1975:49), to "avoid crime and the fear of crime" and "deteriorating public schools" (Newsweek, 1981:29). Discussion of the turnaround in the media has a clearly racial aspect.

Virtually no specific data exist with which to evaluate these media impressions. Surveys have shown that people are moving for a host of "environmental" or "quality-of-life" reasons, and many of the migrants' responses to questions have provided statements which could easily be interpreted in a racial context. It has not been unreasonable to assume that racial undercurrents were being expressed in survey responses citing such things as "neighborhood decline" or "rapidly changing neighborhoods," "crime in the streets," "safety for children," "deterioration of schools," or "busing" as reasons for moving to nonmetropolitan areas. However, there has been no direct assessment of the importance of race in such responses. To be even more explicit, there has been no direct inquiry into the extent to which the turnaround is a variant of "white flight."

Several basic demographic facts have been ignored in analyses of the new migration. It is the case, first, that many of the major urban centers in the United States have become dominantly black in the central city areas (Zuiches and Brown, 1982:61). And second, it is also the case that rural areas have experienced substantially more increase in

white than in black population in recent years (Barabba, 1975:53-54). Putting the two demographic facts together, and linking them with speculation about motives for migration, leads to the plausible assumption that the new growth in many rural areas is not only dominated by whites, but is also quite possibly a variant of the "white flight" from the city.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the extent to which renewed population growth in the rural Midwest is a white phenomenon with possible racial undercurrents. The analysis will be more circumstantial than directly analytical because direct evidence on the racial composition of the urban-to-rual migration stream is lacking. Available data on motives for migration will also be examined, with special attention to next steps in that area of research.

TURNAROUND MIGRATION AND RACE

The analyses which follow are based on recent census data for counties in the North Central Region, and on results from a survey of 501 urban-to-rural migrants in the region (Sofranko and Williams, 1980). The survey focused on the 75 high net inmigration nonmetropolitan counties of the Region, those which had experienced at least 10 percent net inmigration between 1970 and 1975. While the thrust of the study was concerned with migrants' decision-making, it also provided considerable information about the places migrants were leaving. A majority of the urban migrants came from within the North Central Region, and most originated in three major cities (Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis). Seventy-five percent of the urban-to rural migrants identified their former residences as lying

within the boundaries of large urban places, with the remainder stemming from smaller places within SMSA's. Thirty-four percent indicated origins within cities of at least 250,000 population, and nearly half indicated they had moved for a variety of "environmental" or "quality-of-life" reasons. One would thus expect that conditions in their former metropolitan residences would have helped shape migration decisions. Can it be demonstrated, however, that the rural-to-urban migrant stream is predominantly white?

Racial Composition of High Growth Rural Areas

Recent census data permit one to determine whether rural counties which are known to have experienced high net inmigration in recent years have been gaining population classified as white and black at the same or at different rates. Total population gain is obviously not the same as gain through net migration, but changes in the racial composition of growth counties provide a basis for making tentative inferences about the racial composition of the inmigrant stream. If, for example, a rural county has been experiencing substantial net inmigration, but shows little increase in black population from 1970 to 1980, one can infer that the inmigrants were predominantly white.

Data on race were obtained for the 75 high growth counties from the 1970 Census of Population and from Advance Reports of the 1980 Census of Population. These data permitted tabulations of change in total population between 1970 and 1980 and change in numbers by race (Table 1).

Table 1 about here

The 75 high growth counties had an average size of 12,765 in 1970, and increased to 16,560 by 1980. Most of the counties were entirely rural in 1970, a minority were adjacent to metropolitan counties, and they ranged in size from 2,221 to 39,175 in 1970. Their growth rate of 29.7 percent for the decade merely confirms the rationale for their selection as high growth counties in the earlier study.

Given the general perception of the rural and small town Midwestern population as almost exclusively white, and the documented decline in the minority component of the nonmetropolitan population (Barabba, 1975:53-54), we had expected that the growth counties' population increase would be almost exclusively white. When population gain was calculated by race and expressed as a rate, however, these expectations were not supported. The 75 counties' white population had increased by 29.1 percent from 1970 to 1980, but the black population had also increased by 29.1 percent (Table 1). To provide perspective on the rates of population increase for the two racial categories one must recognize that the total black population of the sample counties was 4,649 in 1970 and that this total had increased to only 6,002 in 1980, as shown in Table 1. In contrast, the white population of the sample counties had increased from 941,986 in 1970 to 1,216,233 in 1980. One's perception of rural Midwestern counties as dominantly white in composition is therefore strongly supported. It is equally clear that population increase in the sample counties was predominantly white. The sample counties gained 284,738 people during the decade, and there were only 1,353 blacks in that total (Table 1).

Interpretation of black population growth in the 75 sample counties from 1970 to 1980 must also be tempered by the fact that the relatively small black population of these counties is unevenly distributed. In

1970, for example, the distribution of blacks in the sample counties ranged from six counties with no blacks at all, to one county with a black population of 1,274. In 1980 there were seven counties without blacks, ranging up to a single county with 1,285 blacks. The latter alone accounts for 21.4 percent of the total 1980 black population in the 75 counties. Change in the black population of the sample counties is also very unevenly distributed. A third of the counties actually lost black population from 1970 to 1980. More dramatic is the fact that 83 percent of the total increase in black population for the decade was concentrated in just five of the 75 counties (Table 2). When the latter five counties are set aside, the increase in black population for the remaining 70 counties turns out to be just 6.0 percent for the decade, hardly suggestive of heavy inmigration. We draw the obvious conclusion that the apparently rapid increase in black population in the 75 sample counties during the 1970's is highly concentrated. If blacks are part of the migratory flow to nonmetropolitan counties, it is not a pervasive phenomenon.

Table 2 about here

A closer examination of the five counties capturing 83 percent of the black population growth for the decade brings to light some further interesting facts. The black population of those five counties more than doubled over the decade, gaining at the rate of 125.6 percent, as shown in Table 2. It seemed likely that special circumstances would have to lie behind such substantial rates of increase, and that proved to be the case. One of the counties has a state college with a significant black enrollment. The other four counties have prisons. The latter four

counties account for 55.3 percent fo the total 1970-80 gain in black population for the entire sample of counties. On census day, 80.3 percent of the 1980 black population of those four counties was classified as inmates of institutions. A substantial fraction of the 1970 to 1980 increase in black population in the North Central Region's rapidly growing nonmetropolitan counties can, therefore, be attributed to involuntary migration to correctional institutions. In general, these results illustrate the role of colleges in nonmetropolitan population growth which Fuguitt and Beal (1978:19) have documented, and also suggest that correctional institutions may play at least a specialized role in such growth.

Motivations of Urban to Rural Migrants

If whites dominate in Midwestern urban-to-rural migration, is race given as a reason for migration? Data presented in Table 3 show a breakdown of the main reasons Midwest migrants gave for leaving metropolitan areas. Environmental "push" reasons, those citing some negative feature of the place of origin, are somewhat more prominent than the employment category which has figured so heavily in previous explanations of migration (Ritchey, 1976; Greenwood, 1975). Nevertheless, "push" factors represent only about a fourth of all reasons. A quick examination of Table 3 shows that a majority of the migrants gave reasons for which there is no apparent racial motif. Employment, ties in the destination area, attractions in rural residences (environmental "pull" factors), retirement, and other unique reasons account for almost three-fourths of all reasons given. It is not likely that most of these responses directly reflect urban racial conditions.

Tables 3 and 4 about here

It is among the environmental "push" reasons (26 percent of the total) that one would be most likely to detect racially directed responses. These are scrutinized more closely in Table 4. Environmental "push" reaons were defined as those which mentioned some undesirable aspect of the former residence as the basis for the decision to move. Respondents' reasons were coded as being either general statements critical of the former residence, or as specific, that is mentioning specific negative features. Almost half of the "push" reasons were non-specific. Very few respondents specifically mentioned a racial reason as the main reason for moving (see also Long and Hansen, 1976:6), but that does not preclude race from being an issue in some of the other mentioned reasons. That this is a possibility is shown in the verbatim comments illustrating these reasons in Table 4. Race is probably an underlying element in the "crime/safety" category, the "overcrowding/congestion" category, and perhaps in the "school quality/busing" area as well. What is apparent in the verbatim comments is the mixing of race with other specific objections to urban living. Detailed examinations of how race figures in the turnaround will have to unravel the racial component in mixed motive responses.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

This paper has examined several aspects of the tacitly accepted but largely unanalyzed relationship between the recent population turnaround and race. Despite a backlog of several years worth of research on numerous aspects of the turnaround, little is known about the role of racial aversion in the shift, the degree to which many of the quality-of-

life reasons migrants give for moving contain racial overtones, or of the involvement of blacks in the new migration. The present study draws on both secondary and survey data from the Midwest to argue that there may indeed be more than a casual connection between urban-to-rural migration and race.

Data from the 1980 Census demonstrated that population increase in 75 Midwestern nonmetropolitan growth counties is predominantly white, as expected. Census data also demonstrated that the numerically small black population increase in the growth counties could largely be accounted for by the presence of a college in one county, and by prisons in four other counties. Black migration to rural growth areas is clearly not pervasive. Much of it seems to be involuntary and one must treat that as a special case. By inference, then, urban-to-rural migration in the Midwest is predominantly white.

Why has the race issue been overlooked in research on the turnaround? One reason for the oversight may well be the fact that the considerable attention to migrants' motivations has been directed to the broad question: are the new migrants' motivations different from the traditional job-related motivations that are so prominent in the migration research literature? The survey data analyzed in this paper clearly point to the importance of noneconomic motivations. But race does not emerge as an issue at that level of questioning, and perhaps should not be expected to surface because of hesitancy to volunteer information about racial views.

It is true that many of the noneconomic reasons for moving which migrants cite can be interpreted as having racial overtones. Such issues

as "busing," "urban crime," or "undesirable conditions in the city" may well be code words which mask direct expression of racial views. One can only speculate about hidden meanings, however. The wiser course would be recognize that race is a sensitive issue and design questions which probe that issue directly.

Bradburn and Sudman (1980:14-19) make a number of suggestion for obtaining data on threatening topics. One of their most directly useful suggestions (p. 15) calls for a relatively long question format. They suggest that a topic such as race can be addressed with questions of the form: Many people think (thus and so), what do you think? The intent of the lead-in (many people ...) is of course to make it more acceptable for respondents to express their views (or reasons for migration) in responding to the interviewer, a relative stranger.

Direct questioning about race as an issue in migration decisions would be useful, but represents only part of a much more fundamental problem. The survey data cited in this paper included several illustrations of mixed motives, in this case instances in which race was mentioned in conjunction with some other issue. One might design ways to disentangle such mixtures but the more fundamental problem is that migration decisions are very probably not based on single issues or single motives. Much work remains to be done to specify particular motives and to devise ways to evaluate the trade-offs that must occur in migration decision-making. This task is made more complex by the fact that the race issue can be expected to impinge on migration decision-making in diverse ways, e.g. with reference to concern about schools, neighborhood conditions, and public safety issues.

DeJong and Fawcett (1981:13-58) have developed a conceptual framework for systematic analysis of individual-level and family-level migration decision-making. Their model, as yet untested, can serve as a starting point for further research. They specify, first, a series of broad values or goals that might be achieved by migration (e.g. wealth, status, comfort). They also suggest various indicators of each of those goals. Second, they recommend procedures such as paired-comparisons to estimate the priorities attached to various goals. Third, they argue that research on migration decision-making must be based on prospective designs. That is, analyses of reasons for migration have typically been after the fact, as in the present study. That type of design suffers from the obvious weakness that a given reason (e.g. concern about schools) does not necessarily distinguish migrants from nonmigrants.

Without going into further detail on the DeJong and Fawcett (1981) conceptual framework for work on decision-making, it should be apparent that the task of moving from an abstract economic versus noneconomic "reasons" type of analysis to a micro-level decision-making approach is formidable. Still another suggestion that DeJong and Fawcett (1981:38) make points to the merit of monitoring macro-level factors which might influence individual-level decision-making. The latter relates directly to Campbell and Swearingen's (1983) approach to explaining the turnaround. As related to the race issue, for example, Campbell and Swearingen (1983) argue that the upsurge of race riots during the 1960's may help to explain the dramatic reversal in migration patterns of the 1970's. By inference, a relative decline in macro-level stimulating events would lead one to expect a corresponding decline in migration.

It is not our purpose here to specify a research design for migration decision-making at either the micro- or macro-level. Our purpose has been to draw attention to race as one of the issues which may help to explain the turnaround. Consideration of the task of specifying race as an issue led us to consideration of the broader issue of devising ways to account for and predict migration patterns. We have attempted to demonstrate that it is plausible to hypothesize that race is an issue in the new migration. Like the earlier outflow of city dwellers to the suburbs, the new flow of migrants to more remote rural areas may be a variation on "white flight." As a recent commentator on the new migration (Bryan, 1982:16) put it, "...like freedom, 'moving on' is multidimensional. Many of it's properties are dark on the edges...." Some of the suggestions for further research may be helpful in shedding light on that darkness.

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Table 1. Population and population increase, 1970 to 1980, by race, for 75 nonmetropolitan growth counties of the North Central Region

Race	1970	1980	Change, 1970-1980		
			Mean		
			Numerical increase	Increase per county	Percent increase
White	941,986	1,216,233	274,247	3,657	29.1
Black	4,649	6,002	1,353	18	29.1
Other	10,629	19,767[a]	9,138	122	86.0
Total	957,264	1,242,002	284,738	3,797	29.7

[a]The increase in "other" stems in part from the fact that "...in 1970, most persons who marked the 'other' race category and wrote in a Spanish designation ... were reclassified as 'white'. In 1980, such persons were not reclassified but remained in the 'other' race category," (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980: PC80-1B, App. B. p. 3.)

Table 2. Change in black population 1970 to 1980, for 75 nonmetropolitan growth counties in North Central Region

Black population change in decade	Number of counties	Black population 1970	Black population 1980	Change, 1970-1980 Numerical gain/loss	Change, 1970-1980 Mean Gain/loss per county	Change, 1970-1980 Percent gain/loss
Lost black population	25	855	612	-243	-10	-28.4
Slow to moderate gain	45	2,897	3,366	469	10	16.2
Rapid gain	5	897	2,024	1,127	225	125.6
Total	75	4,649	6,002	1,353	18	29.1

Table 3. Distribution of migrants' reasons for leaving metropolitan residences

Reason	Number	Percent
1. Environmental "Push"	130	26
2. Employment-related	122	24
3. Retirement	86	17
4. Environmental "Pull"	71	14
5. Ties in destination	37	8
6. Other	54	11
Total	500	100

Table 4. Distribution of environmental "Push" reasons for leaving metropolitan residences and illustrative verbatim statements of migrants

Reasons	Percent	Examples of verbatim statements
1. Non-specific urban "Push"	Total = 12.4	"Didn't like the city life; was tired of it and wanted to move out" "Wanted out of the city" "didn't like it there"
2. Specific anti-urban	Total = 13.6	
A. Crime/safety	(2.8)	"I was tired of city crime" "Colored kids were beating up my children" "Didn't feel safe, crime"
B. Race	(.2)	"Colored people"
C. School quality/busing	(1.8)	"School situation -- busing and bad education" "For better schools" "Schools were unsatisfactory"
D. Neighborhood/area	(2.6)	"Didn't like living next to trailer court" "Wanted to leave that area" "Became too impersonal"
E. Problems raising a family in the city	(1.0)	"Wanted a better place to raise kids" "Didn't want children to grow up there" "Wanted children to grow up in a nice rural area"
F. Overcrowding/congestion	(5.2)	"It was getting too congested" "Too crowded" "Too many people, crime, blacks"